

Interpassivity and the uncanny illusions of our daily lives

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An Introduction on Interpassivity: it looks like an illusion, it feels like an illusion, do not be fooled - it is an illusion.

Pfaller's book *Interpassivity- The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (2017) provides us with a detailed theoretical examination of interpassivity and its impact within culture. More than a '*mental experiment*' the notion of interpassivity not only provides a theoretical workframe, but it also renders a practice. The fundamental tension provided from within interpassivity, fills the necessary requirements to properly examine some of the deemed mysterious and curious elements of the civilised post-modern existence. With this investigation, the author provided a theoretical perspective that opened up different possibilities of approaching or re-approaching crucial elements for many different fields, as well as, provoked an opening to many insightful articulations. From philosophy, psychoanalysis, art theory, literature, and now reaching many others fields, the consequences of interpassivity and its productive provocations seems like a crucial theoretical element for knowledge nowadays.

Through the notion of interpassivity, Pfaller prescribes an explanation to some of the most fascinating behaviors within our culture: magical acts performed by civilized, enlightened individuals. Well, in order to investigate and to formulate the structural mechanisms of such concept, the author relates it to the unperceived magical acts which are performed by civilized individuals,

developing a dedicated examination of rituals and finally, to the peculiar capability of delegating enjoyment through interpassive gestures. Borrowing from Mladen Dolar's (cf. Dolar 1991: 6) explanation of the Lacanian development of *extimate*¹, one could say that interpassive behavior has a remarkable extimate aspect bound to it. To certain extent, interpassivity is a theoretical designation that aims at the blurred lines of reality and illusions for the subject. Pfaller posits that: "Interpassivity is thus a strategy of escaping identification and consequently subjectivisation...Interpassivity is therefore either an anti-ideological behaviour, or it is a second, and entirely different, type of ideology that does not rest on becoming a subject." (Pfaller 2017: 8) Forcibly, such extimate quality of interpassivity, provides unexpected answers to previous models, ideologies and so on.

Although the book renders a profound examination of this complex theoretical development and covers its depth by going through many different directions and possibilities, some fundamentally uncanny questions formulated by the author could lead the way, given the overall idea of what such notion seeks to designate. These are some of the questions that seem to resonate through a large portion of this research: "Why do we prefer to live through some irrelevant other instead of enjoying directly, by ourselves?" (Pfaller, p.50) or formulated like this: "Can the experience of pleasure be delegated in the same way as some other feelings or convictions?" (Pfaller 2017: 33); "...what is the connection between the present agent and the absent person?" (Pfaller 2017: 33) and finally, "Can my representing agent also let him or herself be represented by someone (or something) else? And for whom does that new agent then experience the pleasure – for the other agent or for me?" (Pfaller 2017: 33) Comparing them, one could notice how such questions encapsulate this mysterious element of a complex extimate relation between the subject, enjoyment and illusions.

Most of the examples given to illustrate such phenomena, although diverse tend to preserve a certain logic of extimacy. From the Žižekian understanding of the Tibetan prayer wheels², to Kafka's "drinking mates" that enjoyed a cold beverage when he could not³, and also, considering the example of the intellectuals that enjoy their printed copies of books they were meant to read – the fundamental element of delegated enjoyment to others (could be things or people) is sustained by the interpassive subject. Pfaller's investigation of this phenomena starts with the approach to the Freudian notion of 'substitutive act'. Interpreting that a 'partial relief from the tension that had originally been connected with the wish to read the book' (Pfaller 2017: 38). Therefore, to deal with this possibility of secretly investing psychic energy in an act, while (unknowingly) aiming at another, gives to the interpassive person the possibility of experiencing pleasure through substitution. Such logic is familiar to Freud's development of fetishism and obsessional neurosis, but Pfaller invites Mannoni's interpretations in order to present a broader render of such element into human behavior (Pfaller 2017: 44). A brief overview of interpassivity in psychoanalytic terms tells us that a libido-economical reading of cultural enjoyment through some aesthetic experiences sets an ambivalent

reaction for the subject. Following Pfaller's (cf. Pfaller 2017: 44) interpretation, such ambivalent experience generates an intrapsychic conflict to the ego, that instead of aiming at ego-perfecting by identification solves the conflict by splitting itself. As Pfaller himself puts it: 'Interpassive acts are, like those of obsessional neurosis, substitutive acts that result from an intrapsychic conflict.' (Pfaller 2017: 43) So, delegation of enjoyment introduces a relationship between the individual and its representatives, not organized by identification but rather by a viable solution of pleasure through relief of interpassivity behavior which allow for some previously experienced pleasures.

So, one could say that the investigation of such human features, is on a first level, an investigation of specific situations (as seen from the previous examples), where someone deals with illusions and its effects. Implying that on a second level, those very own illusions operated by interpassive subjects have a function. The interpassive person acts through substitution, operating on his or her pleasure through an objetal or human substitute⁴. Such interpassive act generates a viable relationship of indirect enjoyment, which could be on one hand, simply better than nothing (as seen in Kafka's example), but also, showing a potential capability of being even better than the direct enjoyment, since you do not have to deal with all the efforts and troubles to achieve such pleasure (following the logic behind the example of intellectuals and their passion for photocopying books they will, probably or most definitely, never read...). And furthermore, it allows on one hand, the possibility of getting rid of an intrapsychic conflict which is solved by an external agent/element, and on the other hand, rendering a new possibility of dealing with a bygone pleasure. So, a peculiar element arises from this equation: the direct relationship is deferred for the indirect because of a fundamentally legitimate form of enjoyment that is still reached from this interpassive gesture. Therefore, we are dealing here with *illusions of the everyday life*, facing situations where there is 'much more than what meets the eye', and interpassivity comes as a tool to provide the technical comprehension of such mysterious and curious actions of individuals relating to culture.

Pfaller's development of interpassivity as a viable theoretical tool to organize and explore different qualities of illusions experienced by subjects, made me turn my attention towards what seemed at first place, a somewhat suppressed or perhaps hidden element from this more recent investigation. And curiously enough, an element which is familiar to Pfaller's line of research. Therefore, the present article aims at rendering a closer look at interpassivity and another particular effects of illusions previously investigated by Pfaller himself, such as the uncanny and comic. In order to do so, we must examine mainly a possible common thread between the following works: *Interpassivity- The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (2017), *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture* (2014) and *The familiar unknown, the uncanny, the comic: The aesthetic Effects of the Thought Experiment* (2005). After establishing it, and comparing its main differences, we will finally move on to investigate the consequences of such tension. We could justify this study by presenting the fact that in the most recent text (2017) the term *uncanny* appears only in three different passages,

providing us with a few questions: could interpassivity have subsumed or encompassed the effects once investigated through the uncanny and comic? Are the uncanny and comic effects still a part of what is experience through interpassivity? Conversely, could interpassivity provide us with a critical reappropriation of the uncanny or the comical?

A possible intersection: the sneeze from the dead

Inspired by an intuition from Žižek⁵ elaborating on the notion of the interpassive subject (cf. Žižek 1998), this article seeks a possible dialogue between those different texts from Pfaller, through an interesting element that intersects them, which is the example used and developed theoretically by the psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni. Basically, the example goes as follows, an actor playing the role of a dead person suddenly sneezes on stage and the public bursts in laughs. This rather peculiar example, which appears throughout the three main texts, could possibly provide ties and insights regarding the mechanism of interpassivity. In Pfaller's text, *The familiar unknown, the uncanny, the comic: The aesthetic Effects of the Thought Experiment (2005)*, the analysis of the example is that:

Mannoni acutely analyses the characteristic peculiar to this laugh: the audience laughs not because it is freed from the sad conviction that the man is dead, but because the actor's sneeze has freed it from the obligation to maintain the theatrical illusion. As Mannoni states, everything seems to be there in order to generate the illusion, but *in somebody else* - just as if we (the audience) were the actors' accomplices. The object of this kind of laugh is not the good news that the actor is still alive, but the imaginable astonishment of a naive third party who believes in the theatrical illusion and is fooled by audience and actor together, and for whom the impression of the dead man's sneeze must therefore seem uncanny.

The parameters in this example can easily be changed in such a way that the effect of the uncanny arises. Should somebody we assume to be dead suddenly sneeze, it would be uncanny for us. Now we play the role of the naive person - the third party in Mannoni's example. But our own uncanny fright is based on a non-naivety, a suspended illusion. We have to overcome the illusion that dead people can sneeze so that the experience of an assumed dead person's sneeze can seem uncanny. Only in a culture with a tradition of stories about the living (sneezing) dead could we have encountered this kind of illusion; and only when we have overcome the illusion can we experience the uncanny. Because we do not believe in fairytales (familiar to us through our culture) in which dead people show signs of life, this kind of sign affects us in an uncanny way. (Pfaller 2005: 211)

This brief, yet insightful essay, explores the dimension of 'thought experiments' through the relationship between the uncanny and the comical.

The fundamental hypothesis pursued is that *the comic is what is uncanny for others* (Pfaller 2005: 212) and reading closely from Freud's own ruminations of the uncanny [*das unheimlich*] (1919), Pfaller articulates four essential elements: *the occurrence of symbolic causality, success, repetition and the double [doppelgänger]*. Needless to say, all fundamental elements present in Freud's own description of obsessional neurosis (1907) (1909) (1919), but to a certain extent, it is also connected to the logic of fetishism (1927) through "fetishist disavowal"⁶. Indeed, something is produced by this ghostly object, from the laughter of a corpse being played by the actor, defying the logic of better judgment – if we realize that the audience knows it is an actor playing a role – a puzzling question emerges: why do they laugh? And, this line of questioning, as seen in the further theoretical development by the author, provided the foundation to understand the method of interpassivity.

One of the important exchanges we find here is this non-naive *versus* naive perspective of the viewer. It is through this naive viewer of the play, this invisible other, this third-party presented by the example, the one who could have been misled by the actor sneezing, feeling uncanniness that sustain the illusion to everybody else in audience to feel amused and laugh about it. But there is a necessary layer of rationalization taking place here, as the author points out, it is only a culture with built tradition of stories about the dead rising (or sneezing) that could find such an illusion, and adding to that, only by overcoming such illusion can the uncanny element take place. The main point here is that we do not believe in fairytales, affecting us with this uncanny element.

The second interaction with Mannoni's example, comes from Pfaller's *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture* (2014), and it goes as follows:

When an actor plays a dead person this structure is less obvious, but, as Mannoni detects, it has a similar effect. According to theatrical conventions, which in this particular case do not seem to allow much theatrical freedom (in contrast to other cases, where, for example, a tea towel is capable of indicating a castle), the actor has to lie there without moving. This alone seemed striking to Mannoni: 'If the actor doesn't lie still, would one say that it is obvious that he isn't dead? But everyone knows that anyway... nonetheless, everything proceeds as though this knowledge has to remain concealed. From whom? But if the actor were to get a bit of dust in his or her nose (which no stage convention can prevent), the the 'corpse' would have to sneeze. The tension maintained by theatrical convention would then suddenly collapse, as Mannoni suggests, and the audience would break into laughter.

As he says, just as in the case of the mask cult, in the case of theatre, too, it seems to be about an illusion that we are not the victims of, but for which we seem to require a victim who – for our satisfaction – is held in check by the illusion: 'Everything seems to be set up to produce the

belief, but for someone else – as though we (the audience) were in cahoots with the actors.' In all of these cases – both 'primitive' and 'civilized' – actors appear who have situated themselves quite close to an illusion but repudiate belief in this illusion. Some identify other persons by name, in a more or less vague way ('earlier people'), as the carriers of this illusion; other are perhaps satisfied with clarifying that they themselves are not its carriers. And, finally, others say nothing, but do not appear to be the true carriers of such a belief – while simultaneously drawing their pleasure from precisely that (Pfaller 2014: 39).

Pfaller's theoretical development of interpassivity allowed him to demonstrate the paradoxical problems regarding illusions without owners. This previous passage can be found on the chapter on Belief, which follows an entire chapter about Interpassivity⁷. So, Mannoni's example find its place articulated with belief in this book – but, which notion of belief are we considering here? Fundamentally, one already present on the first text, but further explored here. This naive viewer, this Other (borrowing from the Lacanian toolbox of concepts⁸) seems to be a fundamental piece to this equation and its function is further developed in this approach. The author supplements his first comprehension regarding Mannoni's example, making it clear that this other is essential in order for the interpassive theatricality to operate. The scenario provided by this example has all elements at work in order to provoke or to guide towards a belief, but a belief for someone else, it is only this naive viewer that embraces such illusion, therefore allowing the possibility for everyone else to enjoy. In both cases, 'primitive' or 'civilized' (mask cult and theater) the structure of illusion prevails and delegation takes place; although there are additional layers of knowledge present in the 'civilized', the delegation still takes place. This exercise of tricking the Other, through the illusion of the naive viewer enables for the 'enlightened' viewer his or her enjoyment.

The structural element of belief portrayed by the example, ties this paradoxical dimension of interpassivity to its different levels of delegation. The author continues exploring the function of illusions without owners by considering the notion of *croyance* following Mannoni's [1969] development. For Mannoni, this term allows the questioning of 'how a belief [*croyance*] can be simultaneously abandoned and retained'. (Pfaller 2014: 37). Pointing out how *croyance* as a term has this "uncanny" like aspect to its linguistic origins. As well as the uncanny [*unheimlich*] in the German language, that makes room for opposites to meet, by paradoxically containing both meanings under the designation of same term (for instance, being familiar and unfamiliar); in French, the term *croyance* has a 'neutral position between the expressions *foi* ('faith') and *superstition* ('superstition')... (cf. Pfaller 2014: 37) finding no corresponding term in the German language. So, one could determine that the term *croyance* by itself, relates to a crucial aspect of the method of interpassivity, which is the relationship of abandonment and retainment in the realm of illusions. Following Pfaller's understanding, the function of the naive

other to the viewer and its relationship to illusions, provide us with this missing link and viable render of this mechanism of interpassivity.

So, while following Mannoni who noticed how this term seems missing from the index of a Freud volume, Pfaller himself discovers an important contribution to his construction of interpassivity, on Freud's struggles with such notions regarding the 'Rat Man' (cf. Pfaller 2014: 37):

...'Thus he was at once superstitious and not superstitious; and there was a clear distinction between his attitude and the superstition of uneducated people who feel themselves at one with their belief.' Here, Freud encountered the difficulty of finding an adequate term for the peculiar 'educated' form of superstition existing in his analysand. In contrast to the 'uneducated believers', his analysand appeared to have access to better knowledge, by virtue of which the superstitious belief appeared ludicrous to him. (Pfaller 2014: 37)

Freud's clinical concerns about *belief* within obsession neurosis sustain a metapsychological purpose. As noted by Pfaller, Freud in his essay 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices' [Freud 1907] uses religion to make obsessional neurosis understandable and then, "reversing this explicative relationship, sheds new light on the dynamics in the history of religion with the help of his insights into obsessional neurosis." (Pfaller 2017: 85) In this sense, the experience of Freud's obsessional neurotic analysands provided key elements surrounding belief and even more essential, elements regarding the ability of delegating enjoyment through interpassivity to Pfaller's development. But here, there is another puzzling step taken from the first text to the second one. In the first essay (2005) the term interpassivity is nowhere to be found, and there is only this render of 'thought experiments' through the logic of the uncanny and the comic, which explores Mannoni's example of the actor playing dead corpse that sneezes on the stage. The second text validates a quintessential element of the uncanny, through obsessional neurosis to sustain the logic of interpassivity. Then, the approach of belief and the example is articulated – but the 'thought experiment' seems overshadowed or almost obliterated. This reversal could indicate that the notion of 'thought experiment' could have had operated as the blueprint to the development of interpassivity. A more solid argument to backup this claim comes from the core of obsessional neurosis and the exploration of belief, which are elements that cross this bridge between both essays by the author. Some breathtaking aspects about this perspective comes from some viable consequences which could be explored, for instance: a) the rehabilitation of the uncanny as a clinical component for psychoanalysis through interpassivity; b) interpassivity as a homological phenomena to the Lacanian object *a* (through its commonality derived from the uncanny and the Greek chorus⁹) or c) the necessary approach of interpassivity and the Lacanian *object a* from the standpoint of the praxis of psychoanalysis. But, in order to sustain such radical conclusions, a proper theoretical study is required, which goes far beyond the purpose of the present article.

So, going back to our line-of-thought, let's take a closer look at Pfaller's more recent developments on Interpassivity (2017), specifically to our key example:

This principle of pleasure from delegating our wishful attitudes also applies to our practices of art and art reception. Octave Mannoni has illustrated this with the example of an actor who, while playing the role of a dead person, suddenly gets a tickle in the nose from the dust of the stage and sneezes. Of course, the spectators burst out in laughter. But, Mannoni asks, what are they laughing about? Since they themselves knew quite well that the actor was not dead, it seems that they are laughing at the imagined astonishment of somebody who did not know what they knew (cf. Mannoni 1985a: 163).

The basic pleasure of a spectator therefore seems to be an interpassive one: it consists of creating and splitting off another character who serves as a backing for the illusions that one does not share but still finds great. Pleasure in art thus turns out to be a pleasure of continuous 'disidentification' (cf. Mannoni 1985b), of splitting off imaginary spectators. This has, for example, been noted by Jonathan Culler with regard to the pleasure of reading: this pleasure is based on a constant 'splittedness' of the reader who imagines 'what a reader would think'. Reading implies, according to Culler, working 'with the hypothesis of a reader' (1983: 73). Interpassivity thus appears to be the most general structure of aesthetic pleasure. It is not only at work in special cases like that of canned laughter where the interpassive medium is strikingly manifest. It also underlies the allegedly normal forms of art observation: even in such normal cases, the observation is constantly delegated to 'invisible observers' or 'implicit readers'. This delegation is a necessary precondition for aesthetic pleasure. A theory of interpassivity is therefore the key to a general aesthetic theory. Yet the consequences of Mannoni's discoveries could cause a major theoretical revolution not only for aesthetics, but also for mass psychology. For they indicate that social groups can be held together by the pleasures provided by delegation. Interpassivity would thus prove to be a key for the understanding of libidinal mass-bondings. (Pfaller 2017: 44-45)

More than a simple addition to the previous constructions on interpassivity, here Mannoni's example illustrates a basic pleasure of the spectator regarding the aesthetic pleasure. Here, the 'special' cases and the 'normal' forms of aesthetic pleasure are at work. In the first case, the interpassivity medium seems to operate, while in the 'normal' form of aesthetic appreciation, the delegation to 'invisible observers' appears. But in both cases, the delegation seems necessary "precondition" for aesthetic pleasure and Mannoni's example opens the possibility of covering more grounds than the aesthetic theory – it leads towards mass psychology. Now, we can see how this term can be used to infer peculiar mass-bondings through delegated pleasure and moves on from being this essential notion for aesthetic theory, it becomes a

functional theoretical element to consider the quality of transference, in psychoanalytic terms, to other social and cultural situations.

And if we are considering this particular example from Mannoni, the thinker who cannot be left out from this conversation is Alenka Zupančič. The philosopher answers to Pfaller's *The familiar unknown, the uncanny, the comic: The aesthetic Effects of the Thought Experiment (2005)* study, in an article from the same year called *Reversals of Nothing: The case of the sneezing corpse*. Objectively, her answer to Mannoni's example is that:

There are some grounds for challenging Mannoni's reading of theatrical illusion as basically following the scheme of "fetishist disavowal" or delegated belief (we know better than to believe this or that, but we keep on believing it by delegating this belief to the Other(s), by presupposing it in the others)... although we know that the things we see are not real (or really happening), we (can) believe they are *via* the hypothesis of the Other for whom this performance is put up, or via the presupposition of some others who would believe the performance real. According to Mannoni, at stake here is the same kind of delegated belief that helps us to maintain, against our better knowledge, some of our own archaic beliefs which are banned by the demands of rationality that we live in. Although this structure of delegated belief, conceptualised by Mannoni and some others, is absolutely pertinent and applies to many a case of our everyday interactions, it is questionable if it indeed applies to theatrical illusion (or, more broadly, to other forms of artistic fiction). (Zupančič 2005: 176-178).

Zupančič's investigation of ghostly dimension of the sneeze rises the complexity of the notion of object and its relation to the subject, almost in the same way as Mladen Dolar's (cf. Dolar 2006) analysis and explanation gives a proper theoretical decency to the voice. So, Zupančič's investigation on Mannoni's example through the Lacanian distinction between real and reality provides a whole other realm of consequences for this investigation, specifically when the thinker highlights: "that the real is not something to be unveiled or revealed under the always somehow deceiving reality (as essentially imaginary, or "fantasmatic"), but something to be *constructed* (which is different from being represented or imitated). This is why a certain dimension of what an artistic "fiction" produces can very well be the real". (Zupančič 2005: 177) Therefore, her examination on Pfaller's 'theoretical experiment' presents the tension between the logic of the uncanny and of the comical, grasping the depth of the blurred lines provided by those notions and in addition, reassuring a dark duplicity involved in those *in-between* reversals of nothing. This means that the theoretical construction provided by the thinker illustrates how that the comical and the uncanny partake in reversals of nothing. On one hand, the comical revolves around constitutive dislocation (as immanent nothing), because it enacts the object of the drive and participates into the psychoanalytic logic of Drives; the uncanny, on the other hand, derives from constitutive lack (as transcendent nothing), participates to the logic of

desire. Therefore, the scenario lifted up by Pfaller finds through Zupančič's interpretation of Mannoni's example of the sneezing corpse, a whole new set of philosophical perspectives that could even reach the classic philosophical opposition of materialism *versus* transcendentalism. Zupančič's short-circuit between philosophy and psychoanalysis find through the reversals of nothingness a radical speculative depth to the very human experience of illusions. One could, intuitively, even say that such appropriation on the reversals of nothing, resembles what the Banach-Tarski paradox represents to mathematics. This productivity double aspect from nothingness, that Zupančič analysis from Pfaller's examination of Mannoni's example finds, forces us to look closely not only at illusions, but also, at nothingness as such.

Perhaps, this is why Pfaller's interpassivity changed so much over time, also giving us the reason why it became more and more obscure in its internal duplicity. Finally, if we go back to Pfaller's work from 2014, and carefully read the passage where the author sews the elements of interpassivity to the uncanny, we will be able to understand the point pursued throughout this article:

If compulsive acts can be compared with magic, then it seems that so, too, can interpassivity's similarly compulsive substitute acts. Like compulsive acts, interpassive acts are substitutive and symbolic acts. They constitute attempts - using such symbols - to fend off what is symbolized by fiddling with symbols also correspond to the most common description of magic: with magic, it is typical that 'a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes'...This symbolic, figurative nature seems equally characteristic of magic acts, compulsive acts, and interpassive, substitute acts. In all three areas, this figurativeness is distorted beyond recognition in some cases, and can be clearly recognized in others...On the basis of these two misjudgements, interpassivity reveals a similarity to obsessional neuroses. There, too, inability to recognize the compulsive acts corresponds with the impossibility of experiencing them as pleasurable. (Pfaller 2014: 28-29)

So, reading closely this passage and paying attention towards what we've learned so far about 'thought experiments', also about the development of interpassivity over time and its articulation on the uncanny and the comical; it is plausible to assume, at first, that without the notion titled interpassivity, Pfaller breaks down Mannoni's example with the elements he has in hands - which is a 'thought experiment'. Of course, that the critical analysis of this particular example does not cover the whole recent designation of what interpassivity articulates - the conceptualization did become monstrous, in the sense that transcends its own form. But, perhaps through this brief archaeology of knowledge we've managed to see further on his research of interpassivity. Nonetheless, with the theoretical background of the uncanny and the comical, posing this formidable space of exploration for the author; Pfaller progressively, enlarged the viability of interpassivity into a formidable central notion, subsuming the uncanniness and the comical to its very own core. Even

allowing the inference that Pfaller integrated Žižek's prescription of encompassing the tension of the double uncanny within interpassivity, perhaps just as much as Zupančič had done so in her study. Finally, another element that supports this claim, and which also provides ground this for interpretation, comes from the fact that Pfaller's more recent work *Interpassivity* (2017), only has three brief passages on the uncanny¹⁰ and one on the comical¹¹. Not one of them vitally comes across the Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalytic description as a fundamental articulation of *fundamental* notions. It is almost as if interpassivity as such, had move past them. But have the notion of interpassivity let them go? Absolutely not. Therefore, it seems reasonable to propose that the notion of interpassivity now has this *extimate* quality inherited in its dna, working as its conceptual blueprint, perhaps for having subsumed the dark double uncanny and the comical of the past 'thought experiment' into the core of the current notion of interpassivity. Now, interpassivity renders a differentiate understanding to the uncanny and also, to the comical, but further studies are necessary to sustain this articulation.

We still need to talk about obsessional neurosis:

Different from the nosological approach that the medical discourse names *obsessional compulsive disorder* (OCD), it is necessary to understand the psychoanalytic etiology for obsessional neurosis in order to comprehend its core within interpassivity. So, without derailing so much from our main thread, let's move back to where this brief archeology of knowledge of interpassivity took us: *obsessional neurosis* for psychoanalysis. Freud tells us that the obsessional neurotic defense finds through symbolic 'rituals' a way to establish itself for the subject, which "led Freud's analysands to the idea of equating the symptoms of obsessional neuroses with those of religious life...if one compares compulsive acts with magic rather than religion, it seems that this difference, too, vanishes." (Pfaller 2014: 27) To a certain extent, to deal with obsessional neurosis in psychoanalysis is to bring Freud's largest investigation on that matter, especially the case of the 'Rat Man' [1909] back to life – of course, this article has no intentions of presenting the entire complexity of obsessional neurosis for Freud and or even more, to psychoanalysis itself; what we have here is simply a necessary approximation of core elements of obsessional neurosis that concerning interpassivity. Freud's investigation on the mechanisms of obsessional neurosis, such as omnipotence of thought, repetition and occurrences of symbolic causality, ties his most famous obsessional neurotic patient (the Rat Man) to the symptomatic responses he finds while investigating the Uncanny [1919]. Freud's final addition to this combination comes from the relationship of the uncanny to the mechanism of defense particular to obsessional neurotic patients, where basically the 'ritualistic' procedure emerges as a possible symbolic defense for the subject. So, when the obsessional neurotic suffers from doubting if he or she, controls the very own fabric of reality through omnipotence of thought (which combines elements of animism with surpassed judgments) [1909], [1919], illusions and rationalizations clash against each other, leading the subject to a collapse. And then, such rituals appear to calm her or him down, taking the subject's attention

away from a possible internal, intrapsychic conflict. But, how could a civilized, enlightened, educated individual not seem to realize that this does not make any sense? Freud struggles deeply against this realization, not because the obsessional does not realize it, but specifically because he or she, does it. And yet, this *belief* that goes against reason, manifests itself anyway – it works like a magical act displayed by the subject – it is an act, that does not care if the subject believes in it or not. It simply finds its purpose for the obsessional neurotic.

Continuing this explanation, and also without the illusion of presenting the completion of obsessional neurosis for Lacan, the idea here is to take into consideration insights provided by the French psychoanalyst regarding this neurotic formation. In his fifth seminar called *The Formations of the Unconscious* (1957-58)¹², Lacan explores the dialects of desire for neurosis and highlights pivotal characteristics of obsessional neurosis. Structurally, as the hysteric person, the obsessional finds herself or himself, having to deal with unsatisfied desire – experiencing it in many different ways and levels, but predominantly as lack. The particular aspect of obsessional neurosis has to do with how the subject deals with the appearance of desire, which is basically turning it into a forbidden desire out of it. It is supported through the Other but by its prohibition (cf. Lacan 1958: 291). This is way Lacan prescribed that: 'A whole part of analytic indoctrination is carried out in the line, according to the paths of obsessional wishes. So, the illusion, the very fantasy within range of the obsessional, is ultimately that the Other as such would consent to his desire... because what's at stake is obtaining permission of the Other.' (Lacan 1958: 291) To keep up with the appearances to the Other, to perform, to stage, or to *act as if* for the Other, is what Lacan presents as a fundamental mechanism for obsessional neurotic subjects.

The refinement given by Lacan to obsessional neurosis, relates to this imperative of sustaining theatrically the Other, staging to sustain it, not acknowledging that this dynamic is taking place. So, obsessional neurosis by principle, struggles with fantasies. Following Lacan's findings and his analysis of the obsessional neurotic, the problem for the subject is not this configuration *per se*, but when this configuration seems to collapse – when the Other seems to be at risk, its when the undead aspect obsessional neurosis seems to fringe. Therefore, this complex configuration behind all these grand gestures, all these exploits from the obsessional neurotic are connected to this structure and must, to a certain level, be kept hidden to herself or himself. All this inhuman effort to preserve and to maintain the Other, are staged by the obsessional "without the air of doing so, having the air of aiming at some other thing" (Lacan 1958: 292) fundamentally, to sustain the Other *as such* and to keep its articulation of things in terms of signifier. And although Lacan's research on unconscious formations encountered within obsessional neurosis four pivotal traits for such modality of neurosis: *fantasy*, *exploit*, *symptom* and *acting out*, but, if we go back to the main focus of this article, we can now articulate the importance of sustaining the Other though fantasy for obsessional neurosis to the performative aspect portrayed by interpassivity.

So, Pfaller's conceptual advances on interpassivity rescues this particular aspect regarding obsessional neurosis for Freud and Lacan, through Mannoni's example of the dead actor, which was previously discussed. All of them realized that obsessional neurotic subjects: '...have better knowledge available with which they can distance themselves from the illusion in question - although they cannot do so completely, since they simultaneously express a certain devotion to the illusion' (Pfaller 2014: 40). Therefore, the role of illusions is fundamental, but these illusions do not require a owner *per se*, it could be just the consideration that someone could believe in it. We could even infer that the omnipotence of thought for the interpassive subject deeply expresses retroactively for the subject the own neglected symbolic element of *staging* or acting as if, for the Other. The careful approximation and necessary distinction proposed by Mannoni while investigating belief, and which Pfaller takes advantage from, is regards the different qualities of disavowal between the obsessional neurotic and the fetishist. The author tells us that:

Yet both types of disavowal, manifest illusions as well as latent ones, exhibit a shared defining characteristic: knowing better, which prevents actors from considering themselves as carriers of the illusion. If someone were to label them as the illusion's carrier, then they would quite indignantly. (The fetishists and obsessional neurotics who operate with latent illusions would quite possibly also deny the symbolic character of their actions. That is, they would not only deny that they are the carriers of an illusion, but also that there is any type of illusion involved at all.)... The fetishist *knows* quite well (that the woman has no phallus), but the other phrase, 'quand même...', remains silent - it constitutes, as Mannoni writes, the fetish itself. The situation for neurotics is similar, even though the illusions that they deny (starting from the basic model of denial of the maternal phallus) have shifted to other issues.

This difference between 'explicit' and 'silent' disavowal, which Mannoni dealt with only briefly, can possibly be explained as follows: there is disavowal in which the content of the illusion in question is manifest... with fetishism, as well as the obsessional neurotic's ceremonial acts, the actor is not aware that anything at all is being depicted in their - usually secretly enacted, seemingly 'senseless' - acts. The symbolic character, figurativeness of the act, is lost to them, this the depicted illusion is not manifest. (Pfaller 2014: 39-41)

This distinction is vital, since it not only preserves the clinical validity of the etiology of obsessional neurosis and fetishisms for psychoanalysis, but it also provides in-depth insights regarding its differences even on a clinical level. In this sense, interpassivity provides a nuance to the exploration of disavowal, which is critical in the psychoanalytic diagnosis and conduction of an analysis. To a certain extent, interpassivity may enrich the clinical background of psychoanalysis by allowing an exploration of the discursive position of the subject in relationship to his or her illusions. Of course, this intuition needs

further examination and proper exploration in order to sustain itself, but theoretically seems valid enough to explain some of the phenomena which appear in the psychoanalytic clinic.

Considerations about Interpassivity and protests under neoliberalism:

Could the notion of interpassivity portrayed by Pfaller provide insights on politics? As we've seen throughout this article, interpassivity has a certain paraconsistent fundamentation and it demands tension from most of the phenomena or situations it is exposed to. On Pfaller's latest work *Interpassivity* (2017), the author presents a new set of explanations to some of the curious formulations from his previous work *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture* (2014), for instance, how the attempt to resist the anti-cultural impulse can be precisely what simultaneously realizes it. As the author presents: 'Interpassivity is thereby the creation of a compromise between cultural interests and latent cultural aversion.' (Pfaller 2014: 27) So, Pfaller formalizes that there are always two levels of delegation involved in interpassivity: the delegation of enjoyment and the delegation of belief (in the enacted performance of enjoyment). And this is why:

Interpassivity is always carried out simultaneously at both of these levels: on the one hand, consumption is delegated to a consumption medium - for example, reading to a photocopier; on the other hand, the belief in the equivalence between the consumers and their vicarious consumption media must also be delegated. The interpassive subject does not personally believe that he or she has read via the copy machine; this belief is transferred to the scene's virtual audience. Delegated enjoyment thus always entails feigning enjoyment for an observing agency with the help of a consumption medium, and simultaneously surrendering belief in this feigned fiction to the observing agency. In every act of delegated enjoyment, there is both delegated enjoyment and delegated illusion. The enjoyment is delegated to a consumption medium, the illusion to an observing agency...The mischievous pleasure, which appears in some cases of interpassivity, such as that described by Žižek, seems to rest on the dual character of this withdrawal: having escaped both enjoyment and the illusion of enjoyment, and having delegated both to someone else, seems to be enormous fun. First, one withdraws from the enjoyment, then from the illusion of it - and apparently that produces new, even greater enjoyment. (Pfaller 2014: 30-32)

This particular duplicity within interpassivity provides formidable insights to approach mass-psychology (cf. Pfaller 2017: 205) and furthermore, forces our attention to a group formation not from the standpoint of identification, but from delegation. Well, nowadays, there is a lot of discussions about demonstrations and protests, especially under the current neoliberal conditions, where "it can be seen how this categorical imperative of our culture leads to most affirmative forms of pseudo-emancipatory politics, and even of

self-exploitation" (Pfaller 2017: 79). Let's think here of massive protests that feel, look or sound, like rave parties (or any music show you could think of), or political protests and manifestations, which are remarkably similar to art exhibitions and so on. And considering interpassivity applied to mass-psychology, we could perhaps read the particular double aspect of delegated pleasure at work in this situation as well.

For instance, let's hypothetically consider an interpassive protest, on a first level, it would take place when protesters act as if or *stage* a transformation through a demonstration or a protest which defend forms of pseudo-emancipatory politics and ideals of self-exploitation. Lately, considering protests post-2008, a lot of flags were risen seeking precisely that. Going back to this hypothetical interpassive protest, we could see on a material level, a large or massive group is indeed 'protesting' but subjectively – who could tell for sure what is going? Like Pfaller posits: '...many practices of contemporary culture do, indeed, develop in the direction of increased 'avoiding through playing', common sense's difficulties in thinking are all the more conspicuous. What remains unnoticed in theory enjoys increasing popularity in practice.' (Pfaller 2017: 12) So, could perhaps this massive group of people that show up nowadays in protests be performing this pseudo-emancipatory politics in order to prevent a change to take place? Could this performative action have transformed itself into an avoidance through practice, just as Žižek understands a product's function of avoidance to its consumer? If so, the type of demands echoing from such protests should resemble an obsessional neurotic mode of suffering in neoliberalism. Then, this interpassive protest would be as if the demands of the demonstrators were (unknowingly) sustaining the desire of keeping things as they are – and doing it through the very own act of fighting for transformations – well, basically, interpassivity allow us to see how public demonstrations could indeed stage a change only to sustains the Other. In this conceptual experiment of conceiving an interpassive protest, its logic tells us that far from provoking a productive nothingness from a void created when the Other seems suspended (something that would resemble more the hysterical discursive demand in Lacanian terms) – this type of protests hardly seem to reach such level – interpassive demonstrations *stage* the transformation sustaining the Other. Like a symptomatic ritual, interpassive protests ask for changes just to keep everything in order, quite close to the logic of obsessional neurosis and the Other for Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In this extrapolation, an interpassive protest takes place perduring the most twisted type of narcissism displayed by individuals since modernity – it is an "act" to keep things as they are – where individuals gladly delegate their own demands to someone who actually believes that protests could change things, once they themselves know they do not. And since engagement seems out of the question, since no serious commitment is viable for neoliberal subjects, an interpassive protest, thrives on the fulfillment of delegation of the political thought to this ghostly third party through the practice of protesting. This interpassive practice illustrates the presupposition that a group can actually give a voice to those who cannot voice their own demands – this is staging an act

through an act. Considering the different levels of this interpassive act, especially when it becomes an 'act as if'; an interpassive protest allows for individuals to get rid of their intrapsychic dilemmas and to sustain the real of Capital – that keep up with the economy and its neoliberal agenda – without a scratch. Indeed, this is nothing but an extrapolation from the concept, but it seems like an interesting formulation to be further pursued.

When Adorno and Horkheimer developed the notion of culture industry (1944), they described culture as a paradoxical commodity; where the law of exchange had devoured it completely, up to the point it can no longer exchange and being so blindly consumed that it can no longer be used. This harsh attempt to demonstrate the totality of capitalism going beyond the gates of factories and into the reality of culture, consequently finds no great promises for culture. But, interpassivity provides a critical consideration to culture that moves beyond this first diagnostic. The predicament of capitalism is already here, so the time for old utopian answers and external solutions do not seem to work no more. It all becomes immediately ideological, it feels even naive to presuppose something better than their spoken names. (Pfaller 2017: 81) And Žižek's philosophical materialism seems to provide the necessary tools to fight the struggles of post-modernity and also, the political-economical construction of society under a neoliberal paradigm. One of his theoretical explorations is the notion of belief within capitalism and without it, interpassivity could not be as critical as it is in a social level.

As previously established, interpassivity occurs through the illusion of this naive someone or, in other words, the one who actually believes in the Adam Smith's fairytale of the free market as a self-regulatory entity, so that the debt of the virtualized wealth that Keynesians are so fond of, may never be charged. This ghostly element sustains for the interpassive subjects the uncanny illusion of economy propagated in neoliberalism ideology. And this capitalist uncanniness is fundamentally grasped by interpassivity. In Mark Fisher's most notorious work, *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?* (2009), the author articulates interpassivity and the Disney film *Wall-E* (2008) showing that 'the film performs our anti-capitalism for us, allowing us to continue to consume with impunity. The role of capitalist ideology is not to make an explicit case for something in the way that propaganda does, but to conceal the fact that the operations of capital do not depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief' (Fisher 2009: 13). Borrowing from Fisher's reading of interpassivity on of this Disney film, we can understand the relevance of such concept in order to portray a guiding mechanism of capitalist realism¹³. For Fisher, the notion of super-identification with capital and the possibility of consuming its own criticism seems to be the proper mechanisms of interpassivity. An understanding corroborated by Pfaller's specifically on passages about extreme narcissism, the pseudo-transformative aspect of affirmative politics and the individuals defense of self-exploitation. (Pfaller 2017: 79)

Further than that, interpassivity renders the role of belief within capitalism and consequently, on the cynical subjective state of people. Žižek's

explanation on belief (cf. Žižek 2009a: 93: 206) within capitalism is a common ground between Pfaller (cf. Pfaller 2017: 38–40) and Fisher (cf. Fisher 2008: 13: 15: 78). Interpassivity translates the performative gesture of neoliberal people, that “...believe that money is only a meaningless token of no intrinsic worth, yet we *act* as if it has a holy value.” (Fisher 2008: 13) So, the critical value of interpassivity as a theoretical tool connects with this ability of identifying the role of belief and cynicism – it is a tool which can and must be used from within, instead of an external thought experiment. As Fisher elaborates:

To reclaim a real political agency means first of all accepting our insertion *at the level of desire* in the remorseless meat-grinder of Capital. What is being disavowed in the abjection of evil and ignorance onto fantasmatic Other is our own complicity in planetary networks of oppression. What needs to be kept in mind is *both* that capitalism is a hyper-abstract impersonal structure and that it would be nothing without our co-operation. The most Gothic description of Capital is also the most accurate. Capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie-maker; but the living flesh it converts into dead labor is ours, and the zombies it makes are us. There is a sense in which it simply is the case that the political elite *are* our servants; the miserable service they provide from us is to launder our libidos, to obligingly re-present for us our desavowed desires as if they had nothing to do with us” (Fisher 2008: 15)

Interpassivity is a necessary critical tool for rendering capitalist realism and the neoliberal paradigm of society. Cultural and political tensions are forced through interpassivity to collapse on themselves, and human suffering is *extimate, par excellence*. Therefore, a more classic dichotomy of philosophy between internality and external does not seem to fit to translate interpassive phenomena. The duplicity within interpassivity, its *extimate* conceptual blueprint, allow it to become a proper tool for the diagnosis of the illusions without owners surrounding reality. So, in political and social terms, the old naive position of an external element which would come and transform reality does not work anymore. Fidelity, engagement and commitment are rare commodities within neoliberalism. This is why Fisher’s prognosis seems so bitter: “Without a credible and coherent alternative to capitalism, capitalist realism will continue to rule the political-economic unconscious” (Fisher 2009: 78). It is in the realm of the political-economic unconscious that this battle is lost, the suggestions to change are pseudo-emancipatory symptomatic repetitions. Interpassivity, on the other hand, forces its way into the undead default mode of human existence after 2008, seeking a viable tool to create something else. Interpassivity pays attention to the undead likeness of social behaviors, puts under its scope the empty gestures and claims for the resignification of these particular practices. Perhaps, examining interpassivity in the realm of politics will allow a better understanding of historical symptomatic repetitions and forcing the consideration of illusions that participate into this equation, and therefore, pushing towards a way out or into an alternative direction. A credible and coherent alternative for the political-

economic unconscious which is now ruled by the real of Capital, hopefully could emerge from the critical examination of interpassivity, pointing out towards a resignification of old utopic answers and practices derived from it, aiming at a theoretical-practice that understands reality not ignoring or neglecting the role of illusions, but considering its value for interpassive actions displayed by subjects under neoliberalism.

Conclusion

Interpassivity proves itself to be a vast notion in the realm of speculative philosophical thought. It pays attention to illusions within reality and proves to be a concept which demands a whole theoretical development. The conceptual construction deals with the paradoxical dimension of delegated enjoyment, which is portrayed by magnificent and curious examples, such as: a former alcoholic addict that becomes a great host of parties and enjoys filling the glasses of your guests, or delegating our enjoyment to some object, like an intellectual could find satisfaction in taking copies of the books she or he was suppose to be reading. This paradoxical theoretical concept provides a closer look to the paradoxes of reality – it is a analytical tool to examine the illusions which are embedded in the construction of everyday life. The effort of this article was to portray through a brief archaeology of knowledge, how Pfaller manage to integrate a tension of oppositions within the very own core of interpassivity – namely, the logic of the uncanny and of the comical. But this central element gained more layers of complexification through time, permitting interpassivity to re-enter the realm of psychoanalysis providing a new conceptual took to the clinic. The relevance of interpassivity to the psychoanalytic clinic comes from its closer look at obsessional neurosis and fetishism through its detailed formulations on the relationship of subjects to illusions. Moreover, the conceptualization of interpassivity earns further relevance when it manages to examine the realm of political-economic unconscious, proving itself to be a crucial concept in order to analyse, comprehend and criticize the paradigm of neoliberal suffering for individuals and perhaps, even to formulate viable alternatives to its conundrum.

¹ Dolar's examination of the uncanny experience of the subject through psychoanalysis, posits the crucial necessity of a bridging notion between interior *and* exterior, differently than the traditional opposition of interior *versus* exterior. As Dolar puts it: "All the great philosophical conceptual pairs – essence/appearance, mind/body, subject/object, spirit/matter, etc. – can be seen as just so many transcriptions of the division between interiority and exteriority. Now the dimension of extimité blurs this line. It points neither to the interior nor to the exterior but is located there where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety. The extimate is simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body; in a world, it is *unheimlich*." (cf. Dolar 1991: 6) The approach to this in-between quality of extimate to interpassivity, as suggested here, is nothing but an attempt to help us assimilate some of its intrinsic particularities. See also Lacan (cf. 1969: 100-114) and Gonsalves (cf. 2006: 25-25: 44: 95).

² Pfaller uses Žižek's example of the Tibetan prayer wheels to illustrate interpassivity on a few passages of his book, each time rendering more depth to his interpretation. Žižek's passage

goes as follows: [I] write a prayer on a paper, put the rolled paper into a wheel, and turn it automatically, without thinking [...] The beauty of it all is that in my psychological interiority I can think about whatever I want, I can yield to the most dirty and obscene fantasies, and it does not matter because – to use a good old Stalinist expression – whatever I am thinking, objectively I am praying. (Žižek 1997: 34) (Pfaller 2017: 30) and he continues interpreting such phenomena as: "The anonymous belief that allows us not to believe is established through performing the ritual. This objective illusion is at work in almost all ritual religious practices. Therefore, we can say that there exists a profound interpassivity of the ritual as such. Through rituals, individuals delegate their religious beliefs to interpassive media." (Pfaller 2017: 61) This is the formulation of the 'ora pro nobis', very common in religious ritualistic experience which designates 'to pray (and believe) in our place.' (Ibid:44)

³ Which could literally be anyone, since the point was not necessarily the person having a beer with Kafka, but Kafka himself having a beer through others. Kafka's own ability of finding this as a solution to his predicament – having tuberculosis and wishing for a beer – says about the viable capability of one satisfying himself or herself through the consumption of others, which is better than not having any satisfaction whatsoever (Pfaller 2017: 41).

⁴ Benefiting from psychoanalysis, Pfaller reads the Freudian notion of 'substitutive act' (cf. Freud [1909]: 243; [1907]: 124f.), where "interpassive people substitute one act with another by investing the latter with psychic energy that was previously bound to the first."

⁵ Žižek instigates the following reading of the interpassive subject: 'Against this background, it is tempting to supplement the fashionable notion of "interactivity" with its shadowy and much more uncanny double, the notion of "interpassivity."' [The Interpassive Subject](http://www.lacan.com/zizek-pompidou2.htm). Centre Georges Pompidou. Paris, Traverses. 1998. Accessed on: <<http://www.lacan.com/zizek-pompidou2.htm>>. And later on, in 2009, in an article with the same name that reinforces that passage: 'To grasp properly this strange process [interpassivity], one should supplement the fashionable notion of interactivity, with its uncanny double, interpassivity'. (accessed on: http://www.lacan.com/essays/?p=143#_ftn2)

⁶ Cf. Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire*, Seuil, Paris 1969, pp. 161–183.

⁷ Pfaller gives an elegant definition for interpassivity and its paradoxical dimension: "When dealing with people who display the tendency to delegate their own enjoyment to other people or to an apparatus, we are here unsuspectingly confronted with the fact that people enact illusions dramatically, with great precision, without noticing in the slightest that they are doing so. It is obvious that they know better, but they behave contrary to this knowledge in compliance with illusions of which they are not even aware. They produce imagination without any image. The method that interpassive subjects employ in their flight from enjoyment thereby leads us to the trail of imaginations without owners." (Ibid.: 15)

⁸ Lacan, Seminaire XVI.

⁹ Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar VII - Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 1986: 295.

¹⁰ On pages 105 and 109 of his more recent work, there are three passages where the term uncanny is utilized. The term has a descriptive aspect to it, places the uncanny as a quality derived from the psychoanalytic *transference*, described by Pfaller as a 'certain way of relating to the other' (Pfaller 2017: 108).

¹¹ On a brief description of a behavior demonstrated through interpassivity (Pfaller 2017: 27).

¹² Lacan, Jacques. *Les formations de l'inconscient* (1957–58), [282–302]

¹³ Fisher's notion of *capitalist realism* encompasses, in short, the ideological model of post-Fordism economic based societies, where its mechanisms reinforce neoliberal capitalism as the only single possible form for economical reality. Fundamentally, that the real of Capital finds through neoliberalism a complementary ideology which propagates it as something untouchable and that its transformation or changes are simply unthinkable or impossible. Fisher elaborates that "[b]eing realistic' may once have meant coming to terms with of a reality experienced as solid and immovable. Capitalist realism, however, entails subordinating oneself to a reality that is infinitely plastic, capable of reconfiguring itself at any moment." (Fisher 2009: 54) This environment of instability in reality, leads to feelings of anxieties and fears, these are part of specific modalities of human suffering aprioristically captured by Capital, so that the real of Capital, does not have to be transformed – an undead like existence. These undead traits are the current modalities of human suffering, matching the excessive narcissism and cynicism as

suitable symptoms for neoliberal subjects. To suffer within neoliberalism is an individual experience and if you are suffering it is **due to** your own inability – you are the one to blame for "missing out" – and, such modality of suffering do not allow subjects to reach the real or the social aspect of their own suffering, which is capitalism. This is a much broader discussion, which I presented previously in the thesis: *Ethics and Monstrosity on Psychoanalysis*. (Gonsalves, 2016).

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